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SIXPENCE

THE FUTURE OF WORK AND LEISURE

“One and Indistinguishable”

We have been treated to two discourses in recent issues of FORUM on the manner of life to be expected in the future Socialist world. This is an interesting and perhaps necessary item of activity for Socialists, as long as we do not over-indulge in the pastime of eating our goose before we have caught it.

The prophets have every right to prophecy—all we ask of them is that they continue to build up their futuristic pictures by applying the scientific method to history and interpreting it accordingly. This, I think, they have done (in the main) and so we readers may absorb the futuristic pictures with no pricking of our conscience.

It is not my purpose to make further exploration along the road of the future, not being equipped with the imagination necessary for such a journey. I would, however, urge those who do venture forth to take stock, so that their reports will continue to be both entertaining and enlightening to those of us who are left at home with the realities of the present system. I therefore propose to discuss the things that point out the direction rather than to report on the end of the journey.

A most important pointer was the one made by S.R.P.: “There will no longer be a separation between work and leisure—work will become the expression of living.” I should like to draw attention to this particular statement which, to my mind, far outweighs anything else.

Human society, under any social-economic set-up, will continue to be primarily interested in living—and living more abundantly. At the moment, most of us accept the fact that life consists of two things, work and leisure (play activity), and we assess our enjoyment of living according to the amount of satisfaction we derive from either or both.

The importance of this statement about the merging of work and leisure is magnified when we realise that Capitalism has brought us to the point where, for the vast majority, these

two human experiences have become separated by a wide gulf. Work has become largely boredom and drudgery, and leisure largely a negative, reactionary activity to work—in other words, work has become the antithesis of play.

History of Activities—

Let us recall, briefly, the historic cycle of man's activity. First, in Paleolithic and Neolithic times by far the greater portion of his time was spent in hunting and gathering to provide for his continued existence. There is no reason to believe that he was conscious (as the workers are today) that he was working at all. Then, with greater mastery over his natural environment and more and more emphasis on a settled community life (with later the idea of possessing land), he began to indulge in more aesthetic pursuits.

The barbaric ages probably produced a relatively better standard of art and craftsmanship than any time before or since. The utilitarian tool and weapon became ornamental—the sword hilt was embellished and the chair legs were carved in pleasing patterns. With the introduction of slavery, for example in Greece and Rome, came the opportunity of the leisured classes—freed from having to earn their own living—to indulge in the higher arts of life.

The peasant, too, tended to become, as time went on, a craftsman and an artist. He knew no leisure time unless it was time spent in improving his surroundings and his command over his fingers and tools. This outlook still prevails in remote parts of our own country. I well remember a farmer living in a remote part of Carmarthenshire saying “whenever you make a gate, do it well, even if only the sheep will ever see it.”

With the expansion of commodity production and its emphasis on cheapness of manufacture came the standardisation of assembly and specialisation of specific tasks. The form of work demanded of the majority of workers becomes relegated to drudgery tasks. This produces leisure activity of an escapist character,

such as a football crowd or cinema audience in the main typifies.

Work and Play Become One—

With the breaking down of Capitalism must come a revulsion to the form of activities associated with it. Socialism, to many people, has been thought of as the Leviathan crushing all spontaneity and individualism. Socialists are, perhaps, somewhat to blame for understressing the individual's existence and over-stressing man's benefits. We are, after all, mentally and physically individual units, with individual desires and needs (once the basic needs are provided for).

The late Professor Nunn who, as far as we can gather, was no Socialist says “an agent thinks of his activity as play if he can take it up or lay it down, or vary at will the conditions of its exercise; he thinks of it as work if it is imposed on him by necessity or if held to it by a sense of duty, BUT WHERE SPONTANEITY IS ABLE TO TRIUMPH OVER THESE THE TWO BECOME, IN FACT, ONE AND INDISTINGUISHABLE.” (“Education: Its Data and First Principles.”)

The coming Socialist world will be created by men and women who will have desired it beforehand. Its inhabitants will be loftier beings, perhaps, than we are—but their progenitors are around us now. They show themselves at work as craftsmen in school, workshops, and countless back rooms and garden sheds, finding delight in putting into their tasks something of their own individuality.

The flesh and blood on the skeleton of production for use will obviously be the revival in the varied forms of beauty and craftsmanship. It will be production for use and enjoyment in the art of production, with no thought of economy in time or materials and no shoddy goods. There is no such thing as shoddy Socialism.

W. T. B.

EVOLUTION and REVOLUTION

At the H.O. forum on "The Nature of the Socialist Revolution" some members expressed the view that Socialism will come about as a cataclysm, or in "one swoop." Others suggested that the closing stages of Capitalism will be integrated with the emergent stages of Socialism.

Here, as at the forum, I shall try to reconcile these two views by suggesting that the second does not oppose the first but, rather, makes it meaningful. Revolutions are evolved—which does not deny that the tremendous speeding-up of events at the height of the revolutionary period may approach cataclysmic proportions.

Let us deal first, in general terms, with some objections to the second, or "evolutionary" position. Among these are:

(1) That it implies that Capitalism and Socialism can co-exist, or that there can be bits one system within the other (i.e. a transition period).

It implies no such thing. Capitalism, despite the modifications that it undergoes as the idea of Socialism grows within it, is still Capitalism until it becomes Socialism. Now, water can be 33° or 211° and at 212° it undergoes a revolution—into steam. But it seems silly to say that the raising of the temperature of the water is not part of the boiling process. Similarly, there is Capitalism as we know it today and Capitalism as it will be on the eve of Socialism. To deny the difference, to deny that Capitalism will become attenuated, i.e. shot through with nascent Socialism, is not merely to believe in miracles but to hold a false view of the way in which human society has so far developed, and therefore of the possibilities of its future development.

(2) That it implies that the S.P.G.B. has no function except of critical commentary.

But when we say society is evolving towards Socialism we are not saying it is doing so independently of men's ideas. The S.P.G.B. says in its propaganda that people can have Socialism just as soon as they understand the want of it. The weakness, from a purely propaganda view-point, lies in the "one swoop" theory, which greets the recruit by saying, in effect: "Your becoming a socialist can make no difference to anything this side of Socialism. We would like you to discuss it with other people—but that won't make any difference either. You

will notice the change when we get Socialism."

Far better is the evolutionary approach: "In becoming a Socialist you are playing a part in the Socialist Revolution which is going on now. As your ideas spread, Capitalism will become prepared for the delivery of the new society which is in its womb."

—♦—
greater approximation of people's ideas (our own included) to the future society.

Lastly, there is the absurdity of the "black-and-white" position. People do not jump from being "all-non-Socialist" to "all-Socialist," despite the fact that we find it convenient to label them. To emphasise the dividing line between social systems leads us to emphasise the dividing line between people. We equate S.P.G.B. members with Socialists, perhaps even to the point of holding the successful Form A to constitute the individual revolution.

Yet things don't really happen that way. If there is a point at which people may be said to become Socialists it is when their ideas "for" it outweigh their ideas "against" it. It is like a pair of scales—with 1 lb. on one side the addition on the other of separate ounces up to 16 does not alter the status quo. If Socialists have a pound or more of social consciousness, then the people who are not as yet Socialists are also adding to their ounces and preparing to tip the scales in favour of revolution.

When a rabid opponent of Socialism says he agrees with us on a particular issue we jokingly say, "then we must be wrong"—but all we mean is that we recognise that changing your ideas takes longer than changing your coat. Cold water becomes hot and then boils: opponents become sympathisers and then join: Capitalism today becomes Capitalism on the eve of Socialism and then Socialism. Over-simplified, of course, but it shows society as a climbing organism, and not just as a series of steps.

S. R. P.

Now the difficulties about accepting the "one swoop" theory. If we deny that Capitalism is becoming prepared for the advent of Socialism, then this denial influences our concept of what makes people Socialists. Instead of saying that people are not Socialists because they haven't (mentally) experienced enough Socialism, we have to give the reason that they haven't (physically) had enough Capitalism. Conditions, we say, will become so intolerable that people will reach breaking-point before most of them will become Socialists.

But, if we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that our Socialist understanding is not the result of Capitalism growing worse, but of our knowledge of society growing better. It is just the thoughts and activities of people that prepare the world for Socialism, and this preparation produces a greater approximation to the new society. Any argument that Capitalism is getting either better or worse is irrelevant—the point is that it becomes less acceptable in proportion as the rationality of the Socialist idea is perceived.

Then, those who think in terms of a cataclysmic rather than a cumulative revolution have a special way of regarding Socialism. They deny that any development of Capitalism will modify our concept of the future society. "We get the same questions today as we got in 1904," they say. Well, yes, that is true to a certain extent. Yet can we doubt that the bundle of ideas that most of us today would agree to call Socialism is quite a modification of the bundle that was generally agreed upon in 1904?

There are, however, more serious drawbacks in failing to acknowledge the development of the Socialist idea. This failure implies that Socialists are "there"—that there is nothing more needed than that others shall learn what we have learned. Our critic puts this in a nutshell when he says we hold that Marx and Engels described Socialism once for all. They did not, of course. The body of ideas that we call Socialist is full of Capitalist fleas that we are (or, at any rate, should be) continually picking out. When we speak of the growth of Socialist ideas we mean not merely the numerical increase in Socialists but also the

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People of the World—Unite!—

We regret that, owing to an oversight, the signature was not printed under this article in the April issue. It was the work of S.R.P.

OUR APPROACH TO THE WORKING CLASS

I agree with Turner that our propaganda should not be "selective" of a section or sections of the working class. It should be directed to the whole working class. Here Turner disagrees:

"It is my contention that all this talk of selectivity, including the selection of the 'working-class alone' as the saviours of humanity, springs from the fact that the nature of Socialism has been forgotten, disregarded, or not known."

It is evident that he has forgotten, disregarded, or not known the nature of Socialism when he says that it is a "way of living." It is not. It is a way of thinking about the problems of society, especially poverty, and advocating as a solution the transformation of Capitalist society to a communal one.

The Party's "form of selection" in directing its propaganda to the working class and not to the Capitalist class is correct, even though it is true that those who are now the employing class would gain something in the new society. But they stand to lose something in the process, viz., luxury resulting from property and their exploiting the workers.) Since it is the working class who have to gain freedom from poverty and exploitation and the right to satisfy their desires by dispossessing the Capitalist class of the means of production, it is of first

importance that Socialism should be directed to them.

Turner says that "if our propaganda is based upon an appeal to the 'working-class alone,' and openly or implicitly excludes all others, then the picture we create in the minds of our listeners or readers, and in OUR OWN, is not that of Socialism but of a universal, idealised Capitalism." This is an example of formal logic resulting from a mere antithetical attitude towards the Capitalist class. To complete the job the Socialist must put forward the synthesis of the proposed new social relations that must result from the dissolution of the old.

No Socialist visualises himself, nor anyone else, living in the future society as the Capitalists do now. While the workers would gain more leisure and greater freedom of self-expression, the excessive luxury of the Capitalist class would disappear, as it could only exist along with Capitalist exploitation of workers.

Turner criticises the implication in our debating title that if workers support the Tories they are misguided, but for Capitalists to do so it is correct. This, he says, is an approach in our propaganda which prevents people from discarding violence as a means to the establishment of Socialism. He seems to imply that its establishment must of necessity be without violence.

How would he know this? The Party's attitude is that we would wish to attain our objective by peaceful means if we may, but by force if we must, the assumption being that the use of force would result only from the violence resistance of a Capitalist class in defeat.

Of course people have prejudices which prevent them from accepting Socialism — but, above all, the prejudices of the Capitalist class are founded upon their property and profit-making, while those of the working class result either from their unquestioned acceptance of ideologies of Capitalism, or their recognition of their economic interests, especially as Socialists. The social revolution is dependent upon the decision of the majority. The working class outnumber the Capitalists by ten to one, so why concern ourselves with them? They are welcome to listen to us, but we are not likely to get a majority of them, even at the eleventh hour.

From Turner's remarks one would think that we should make a special effort to break down the prejudices of the Capitalists. One is reminded here of the "change of heart" appeal of the I.L.P., Charles Kingsley, and Jesus Christ! Has he ever heard of the class struggle, and does he know what it means?

H. G. HAYDEN.

DIVISION OF FUNCTION — Or Coercive Authority?

A difference of opinion exists as to whether men and women will run future society on the principle of each delegated to his or her function, or whether it will require some people in authority to order others to do this, that or the other.

Having authority instilled into us from the cradle to the grave, we appear to find it hard to conceive of a life without some trace of coercion or authority. From the parental "do as you're told" to "teacher knows best," "God knows best," "leaders know best"—all this induces men and women to accept authority (even when imbued with incorrect ideas) as unquestionable—reduces them to mere automatons.

The running of trains is often brought forward as an example of the division of function, and it is, I think, a good illustration. It shows that even under Capitalism each individual, once he has the knowledge of what particular part he has to play, co-operates with others in running the trains. I am not, of course, unmindful of the inequalities of pay and that the resulting puffed-up "dressed-with-brief-authority" grades can imagine that

they control this monster network with "orders."

Recently a member was heard to say that someone must be in authority to see that the trains run to time. But what is time under Capitalism except something used for schedules, timetables, etc.—a means by which human beings co-operate in the "efficient" running of that system and not necessarily in the beneficial running of their own lives? The question of the future use of time as we know it under Capitalism is as presumptuous as that of whether or not we will use trains in the same way as we do today to earn our living.

"CO-OPERATIVE COERCION"

If we understand Socialism to be a state of affairs wherein all give freely of their knowledge and services to society where does it leave room for someone to compel one to take part?

This regard for the necessity of authority or coercion is also held by some who, perhaps, fear that the dispossessed capitalist minority might have to be forced to work. This, it seems, is the "recalcitrant minority" (?) who first of all will have to be forced to under-

stand how good Socialism will be for them before they accept it. How can members speak of "forcing" people to "co-operate" when a moment's thought will show that the two terms are antithetical?

A good example of the running of a concern by workers is afforded by one of the largest catering concerns in Great Britain, which was so successful and efficient chiefly as the result of staff suggestions. Another good instance, surely, of co-operation without compulsion or authority is that of a club—an ordinary social club. Who will deny that the division of function which exists is for the benefit of all the club's members?

Socialism is a system that makes the whole world like a club. An individual who breaks the rules of a democratic club (i.e. acts against the interests of its members) forces himself out of the club, and it is not a case of the other members forcing him out.

It would be interesting to hear from members examples of where authority or "co-operative coercion" will be necessary under Socialism.

G. HILBINGER.

WHAT DOES SELECTIVITY MEAN?

Comrade Turner's article on Selectivity in the March "Forum" should not pass without critical comment. In general its contents appear very largely irrelevant and arise from a repeated mis-statement of the issues involved.

Early in his article Turner, referring to a statement which I made at a recent forum, said: "It was suggested that we should learn from this [advertising technique] and direct our propaganda to people who are more likely to be interested in our case." This is a correct statement of the issues involved in selectivity, and accurately summarises my view on the matter, provided that such "direction" of propaganda is not rigid or exclusive.

Having made this proper statement, Turner asks a number of rhetorical questions and then proceeds to attack a completely different proposition. He asks "What then is there that makes it impossible for Capitalists or any other group to understand and accept Socialism?" Having asked the question (an entirely irrelevant one) he then proceeds to "answer" it as follows:

"The only answer I can see is that the Capitalists' position is not solely due to particular conditions, but is such that they have been affected biologically; Capitalists are somehow prevented from grasping ideas that others can."

Having introduced biological barriers into the argument (an idea as alien to my views as his own) he then sets off in full pursuit of this home-grown red herring. Continuing the only answer he can see he says "This would also be true of all groupings such as Fascists, women, and the people in backward countries whom it is said we will never get to understand or ac-

cept Socialist ideas." The impartial reader will have noticed a second grave mis-statement of the point at issue.

To place the matter beyond all doubt we find a little later this explicit mis-statement of the case for selectivity, a caricature of the real position: ". . . if we take the attitude that there are groups that cannot understand and accept our ideas then our propaganda must be framed to exclude them." This statement, when compared with the first one, lays bare a quite inexcusable misrepresentation of the entire matter under discussion.

It is apparent the essential difference between the following two ideas has not been grasped: (1) Some people can't understand Socialism; (2) Some people are better prospects, more likely to understand than others.

To attack proposition (1) when the matter under discussion, backed up by his own initial statement of the issue, is based upon proposition (2) is as futile as attacking our ideas of Socialism by criticising the nationalisation misconception of Socialism held by the Labour Party.

I am in entire agreement with Comrade Turner (and Parker) in criticising the following ideas:

- (1) That the working class alone are or will be the saviours of mankind.
- (2) That the Capitalists have nothing to gain and everything to lose by the establishment of Socialism.

Further, I agree—we have a message for all human beings. Having said this, however, we do not undermine selectivity; on the contrary, it is reaffirmed.

Because Socialism is in the interests of the whole of humanity it does not follow that all human beings will, at this stage in our development, find our message equally acceptable. On the contrary, our propaganda history (and generally speaking the rise and ultimate triumph of all new social attitudes involving a radical break with outmoded ideas) shows the opposite. Our movement will, in my opinion, grow by ones and twos for some considerable time to come. As I stated clearly in my first contribution ". . . differing environmental backgrounds make for differences of view-point among people which render some more receptive to Socialist propaganda than others. In this way we explain why only the odd one or two at present respond favourably to our propaganda and ultimately join the Party while the majority we meet react in a different fashion." This is a statement about the propaganda situation with which Turner and any other critic of selectivity must deal.

Havink "dealth" with a caricature of the real argument, the article continues "the answer to all this as I see it is that our propaganda should convey our idea of Socialism to ALL people presenting our case to them as HUMAN BEINGS."

Now, no propaganda method has ever been or ever will be devised to convey our idea or any one else's to ALL people as HUMAN BEINGS. S.P.G.B.'ers, Tories, Communists, Fascists, I.L.P.'ers, Capitalists, Workers, Polynesians, Prostitutes and Politicians, we are all identical—AS HUMAN BEINGS.

But to convey ideas of Socialism or anything else, we have to speak within the "frame of reference" of the person or persons we wish to impress. This involves seeing people not merely as HUMAN BEINGS, but as beings born into a given culture pattern, a part of society at a particular phase of development, as human beings in their particularity holding certain ideas and identifications, customs and tradition, minority groups and majority groups, with conflicting hopes and fears and frustrations. The propagandist must not only know his commodity—he must get to know his customer. One man's food is another man's poison (a saying as true of political attitudes as of anything else).

On the question of understanding, let me be explicit. ALL PEOPLE, provided they are interested, have the intellectual equipment to understand Socialism. But the phrase "PROVIDED THEY ARE INTERESTED" is an important qualification to which we must not be blind.

THE WILL TO BE CONVERTED

Comrade Farmer suggests that the following extract from *Health For All*, Jan., 1953, has some bearing on the question of selectivity in our propaganda:

"People can be convinced of new ideas and converted to other beliefs and modes of living. But the will to be thus converted must already be there within them. There must be something in them which is dissatisfied with things as they are, whether it is relative to politics, religion, disease, diet, or anything else. And once there is this dissatisfaction (or mental unrest) within them, then they are ready to pay heed to views contrary to those they al-

ready hold.

"It does not follow that an individual who is mentally dissatisfied with certain aspects of present-day life or thought is likewise dissatisfied with all aspects of such life or thought. But it is generally found that people whose former faith in accepted standards of living in one field has been undermined are more prone to view unorthodox ideas about other aspects of living with an open mind than those who have still that blind and childlike faith in everything orthodox and conventional with which tradition and custom have encumbered them."

The social conditioning of the "interest" factor is a potent matter for the Socialist propagandist. Interest always implies its opposite—indifference. The more a person's energy is canalised and restricted to a few fields, the less energy, inclination and interest are available for other pursuits. The modern world has evolved a tremendous diversity of interests, but there are still only 24 hours in a day.

We are not faced with biological differences which determine whether we tend to accept or reject Socialist ideas, but with socially determined "interest patterns" which make it difficult for the Socialist propagandist to overcome the general lack of consistent, enduring political "interest"—and by implication a consistent and enduring interest in other matters.

* * * *

A further serious misunderstanding of selectivity is apparent in the statement about excluding groups from our propaganda. For my part the exclusion of people from our propaganda or from membership of the Party is not consistent with the Socialist aim. We have a message for all people. It is not us but, as clearly shown above, the nature of society itself which tends to exclude large masses of people from our propaganda.

Further selectivity does not involve dropping public outdoor propaganda, although it does imply a criticism of the sincere but rather

fruitless attempts, at this stage in our development, to do battle at innumerable small outdoor meetings spots where the public speaking tradition does not exist. These atomised propaganda efforts of the "hole in the corner," "two men and a dog" variety, are in my view "almost useless," and largely responsible for much apathy and disillusionment of ourselves and others sympathetic to our ideas—a luxury no revolutionary movement can afford.

Wherever possible it would seem desirable for several branches to stage large, joint propaganda meetings, rather than innumerable unco-ordinated, unattended, unwanted and unsung apologies for "public" meetings. The gradual introduction of selectivity, as future discussion will show, would require the continuation and development of large indoor and outdoor meetings, e.g. St. Pancras Town Hall, Hyde Park, Metropolitan Theatre, etc. These large and successful gatherings are of immense publicity value. They give the impression of numbers (and consequently a prestige value to the idea expressed), a valuable initial impression when trying to influence people, particularly those strongly identified with group opinion. First impressions are vitally important. We should always strive to convey the impression of unity, strength and success. Large meetings do this; something beneficial

for the audience and ourselves alike. As the whole world knows—nothing succeeds like success. In the fifth paragraph of Turner's article he asks which groupings will be least likely to be attracted to our case (a valid question—note "least likely" not "cannot understand"). I have given a general answer: idealist and near idealist groups expressed politically in right wing thought. In justification I have instanced our own emergence. Further I express the view that materialists and near materialists are most likely prospects for understanding our position. To re-phrase Turner's fifth paragraph I would say, Materialist and near Materialist clerical workers, trade unionists, Capitalists, managers, small shop keepers and any other occupational or racial classification are more likely to understand and be interested in our case than idealist and near idealist clerical workers, trade unionists, Capitalists, etc., etc., etc.

That all occupational groupings contain an equal percentage of materialist and near materialist members is, to my mind, unlikely. Quite clearly, whether people are most likely or least likely to be interested and to accept our position is not primarily an occupational distinction, but basically a question of opposing philosophical concepts consciously or unconsciously underlying conflicting outlooks.

J. McGREGOR.



MASS PRODUCTION UNDER SOCIALISM

Comrade Turner, in stating his case against mass production, takes the example of bread making (a good one) in support of his contention. But one does not live by bread alone; and under Socialism only the best goods will be produced.

Let me take the case of mattress making, because it happens to be the work I am partly engaged in. The best kind of mattress made, up to date, for comfort and rest is the spring interior mattress. Inside this there are up to 300 steel wire spiral springs, which are sewn into pockets by machinery. Prior to this the wire has to be processed and tested, and later hair pads are sewn over the springs. In addition, a border is sewn on and finished off by cord piping. All this is done by machinery.

It seems to me that under Socialism this type of mattress is impossible without some form of mass production. Housewives may like baking their own bread, but I doubt very much whether they are willing to make a spring interior mattress to sleep on.

I should like Comrade Turner to explain how such things as gas stoves, electric irons and fires, wireless and television sets (let alone rail-

way engines with their 5,000 independent parts) are going to be produced without mass production. Articles made up of so many pieces are impossible to make in the home. Before Socialism is possible, as Marx and others have pointed out over and over again, large-scale production is necessary. Although we may abolish large cities, it does not mean we are going back to small-scale production.

Attractive Methods?—

Comrade Turner wants to hear about the differences which make mass production methods attractive within Socialism. I will do my best to oblige him.

Under Capitalism a man is tied to a mattress machine for 8 hours—whereas under Socialism he works perhaps 2 at it, making it very much less boring and arduous. Also he is fed, housed and clothed better, and this makes any work more pleasurable. It is just the "excessive" division of labour (which under present conditions has become a curse) that is the means—the starting point—of the increased production and all-round development to which Marx referred.

All the machines I mentioned in mattress

making are easy to work. An operative working on one can change to another, so that over a period of time all the operatives are able to work all the machines.

It is easy to see that when this principle is applied generally it means an all-round development of each individual. Continually doing fresh things, he knows that when he finishes working in one field of labour he can soon turn to another. At the start people will, if necessary, decide among themselves by democratic vote who operates which machine. There is no difficulty here, because the operatives have full control of production.

In short, mass production, rightly understood, is seen to be beneficial to society instead of the curse it is today under Capitalism.

J. E. ROE.

Correspondence and articles should be sent to FORUM, S.P.G.B., 52, Clapham High St., London, S.W.4. Subscriptions 12 months, 7/6d, 6 months 3/9d. Cheques and P.O.'s should be made payable to:—
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THE NATURE OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

5 — The Social Superstructure

In preceding articles something has been said about history and about men. What marks the Socialist is his attitude to history, and what, theoretically, lies behind the Socialist movement is the continuous creation of a theory of history. It is different concepts of history which mark Socialist from non-Socialist, and Socialists from each other. In the first article it was suggested that what we often speak of as a succession of social systems, punctuated by revolutions, are distinguishable phases of a continuous process of social integrations (extrinsically, tribal and territorial fusions; intrinsically, fusions of ad hoc customs into the generalised institutions of property, law, State, etc., and the concurrent modification of general concepts and sentiments). The section on historical materialism stressed this cumulative character of history, the accumulation of means, inhering in the act of production by means of means, as the engine of social change—what Marx calls “the daily and hourly fulfilment” of the human productive act which creates means as dictated by the means created. In the silent, unseen, drop by drop accretion of means lies the mysterious and wonderful emergence of the qualitative changes in human ways that we call the phases of social evolution. It is mysterious and wonderful only in so far as the eye cannot see, nor the mind contain, the infinitude of molecules within each drop in the ocean of human achievement.

In an age of big machines and little men we relax from the “great man” view of history, and begin to relax also from the myths of great ideas and great inventions and great revolutions. We know that inventions are not invented, but grow. We know that great ideas and revolutionary outlooks have a long ancestry. We begin to see that there are no “fateful turning points” on the long road of men’s work and wants, and that the division of history into “social systems” is arbitrary, a mental device to enable us to summarise the countless drops into seeable bucketfuls. We begin to see the revolutions in history as the mental punctuation marks that we ourselves insert so that the unbroken tale may be told, a “say when” for the filling of our arbitrary buckets.

So far as we fail to see the subjective nature of our historical periods and milestones, our philosophy of history is episodic and idealist. It remains at the level of Greek physics, with its ultimate “earth, air, fire and water,” so long as we accept barbarism, chattel-slavery, feudalism. Capitalism as being separated by a

revolutionary/act. It remains at the level of manorial politics, so long as we are haunted by the ghosts of our false separations, with the “dialectical relation” between evolution and revolution, with the order of precedence of thought and action, with the Father, Son and Holy Ghost of base, superstructure and refection, with an immaculate conception of Socialism to save the world from imminent destruction.

As a (historically conditioned) analytical necessity our classical Socialist forbears placed the social superstructure between economic base and ideological dome, as effect of one and cause of the other, which laziness has reduced to an abracadabra to be read forwards (M.C.H.), or backwards (Revolution—where dome, through political superstructure, reconstitutes base) or split (Class Struggle—relations of production in conflict with the forces of production), or circular (dialectical action after thought after action after . . .), which signify with cap and bell the master’s absence. But because genius is no longer socially possible we do not need to play the fool. Ours is the collective task of shaping a more integrated philosophy of society as the sign and instrument of the movement towards a more integrated society.

Society is a structure of institutions, for these are the patterns of co-operative, organised labour, and the structure is neither super nor sub. It is not a part, but the whole, and it has no location, for it is an integrative function. The purpose of human society is bread, and the rest; the organisation of the ways and means is the structure, the institutions. And just as there are no actual boundaries between one social system and another (nor between work, relations, and outlook, nor between thought and feeling, and so on), so there are none between the separately distinguished institutions of a society. Try to trace out the shape of “property” and you find you have drawn “law,” “class,” “family,” “religion,” “State.” As social realities they are aspects of one another.

The correlation of God with the word, the root of mysticism in conceptual (linguistic) thinking, was not mentioned without purpose, but because its recognition is essential to a materialist view. For we deal in social science with intangibles—relationships—whose molecules alone are seeable, as the acts of everyday life, but which in their entirety can only be conceived, because in their entirety they can never be present to the senses. Thus . . .

imagination bodies forth the shape of things unknown . . . turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.” When we use the words “social system,” “economic base,” “family” or “State,” we are stuck with a lawless, inconsequential view of history, and an incoherent, atomised view of society, in proportion as our relativity is less than absolute, in proportion as our necessary distinctions are animated into “real” separations, and having given them a name, give them also boundary and a local habitation.

When did “Property” begin? For practical (arbitrary) purposes the Thames begins at Tower Bridge for the liner; at tide-ending Teddington for the mediaeval barque; in the Cotswolds for the geography lesson; and if you would trace its “real” beginning you must follow up every tributary to every stream to every trickle no thicker than a finger, and then its beginning would slip through your fingers in the broken rhythm of rain and drought, in night mist and morning dew. The beginning of Property likewise disappears into thin air. It becomes a recognisable Thing when its tributary parts (which are tributary parts also of Law, Family, Religion) coalesce to a given magnitude, whose continuous movement is perceptible as change recollected in retrospect. (Some of us would add, with Galileo, that still it moves.)

The continuous character of history cannot be grasped without grasping at the same time the unbounded, unseparated character of institutions. The cumulative character of history cannot be grasped without grasping at same time that changes of social quality (living this way instead of that, thinking this way instead of that) are only changes of social quantity. The expropriation of peasant and craftsman was the concentration of capital into fewer hands, and at the same time it was also necessarily the transference of ownership from single persons to associations of persons, companies, what the French more aptly call the *société anonyme*. To-day’s more anonymous society is only yesterday’s *société anonyme* writ larger, and the increasing anonymity of ownership keeps even pace with the social magnitude of capital, for the quantity of productive means is the quality of social organisation, the quality of men’s lives. The peasant was collectivised, but capitalism was not established by the Duchess of Sutherland. She and the shirt-makers, Lord and Luddite, pauper labour and Peterloo, were only the sparks which flew from the anvil of Kay Arkwright beneath the hammer blows of Bessmer and Boyle. The shape of history was turned under the pressure

of steam, the keen and cunning bite of chemicals, the whirring wheels. Predatory, irresistible, its appetite grown by what it fed on, the merchant capital of wool trade and cloth guild, of East India, Hudson Bay and the Levant ate up the peasants' plots as the flying shuttle of the factory defied the frantic fingers of the weaver and his wife. King commodity was crowned, and to crofter and craftsmen were bequeathed the Inalienable Rights of Man, "the fair market value, as between a willing seller and a willing buyer" of their labour power—wages, cap in hand.

What steam began, heavy water and hydrogen continue. Individual ownership of the instruments of production went out when the power machine came in. Ownership became more vicarious, delegated to the anonymous associations, matched by more and more anonymous associations of labour. Intermediate forms of combine and cartel have their day; the moguls of commerce become an anachronism, the rugged individualist a public pest; the captains and kings of industry depart, commissioners take their appointed places. The accumulation of means which qualify the ways of man goes into higher gear when the productive instruments, in the form of capital, become dedicated to accumulation as an end in itself, as a desperate necessity for survival. The transitions from trading to industrial capital, and within industrial capital from absolute to relative surplus value, are a function of the social magnitude of capital. When it reaches a certain size, trading capital must take possession not only of the products but of the productive instruments. When industrial capital reaches a given social size, it must replace absolute and therefore produces, complete depersonal-

by relative surplus value, and when it reaches a certain size it compels "expropriation" by the State.

* * *

Hardly has commodity society come of age, all things unshackled from fief and freely alienable in personal possession, than joint stock, etc., begin the depersonalising of ownership which limited liability strengthens and nationalisation continues.

The property of a partnership is owned by the partners, but the property of a company is not owned by the shareholders, nor by the directors, who may not even be shareholders, but by a fictitious "person" created and confined by legal instruments which determine the various rights of various real persons, who are thus separated by a whole series of barriers from what was once their property. No real person in Britain owns coal at the point of production, neither the members of local executives, nor of regional commissions, nor of national boards, nor any of their chairmen or presidents, nor the Minister to whom they must defer in regard to prices and production, and who must in turn defer to the Cabinet in turn answerable to the House that Jack built. Social ownership inheres in the nature of capital. The "concentration of capital into fewer and fewer hands" is the progressive socialisation of ownership. The change in the quality of the institution (Property) is the outcome of the change in quantity, and the speed of capital's transition reflects its feverishly cumulative character. Is it too much to ask of the socialist, the materialist, to consider social ownership in relation to atomic fission? Can we not learn from steam and turbine that fission compels, and therefore produces, complete depersonal-

isation because nothing less than society can "own" the atom which is the cosmos?

Failure to see the qualitative changes that we call social evolution as issuing from quantitative change in means and products is itself only an aspect of the erroneous separating of things social, which are seen as separate "parts" (like heart and liver) instead of as aspects of the whole (like "mind" and "body"). It obscures the fact that, as purpose society is wholly an economic phenomenon, while as structure it is wholly institutional, and therefore wholly psychic, behavioural. Likewise the separately distinguished institutions are not separate parts, with points of contact: a given society is wholly Property, wholly Government, etc. There are no parts. Anthropologists tell us of "primitive societies" vapourised by the imposition of a single alien institution or technique, or ethic. The social sciences to-day are sobbing wet tears for an integrative principle which will give coherence and meaning to their brilliant ad hoc discoveries. Yet "we have nothing to learn" because we have nothing to teach. The dumb gesticulate at the blind, the blind rant at the deaf.

The unity of social forms and processes is not sufficiently expressed when we describe institutions as being geared together because geared to the labour which is what society is for, or describe them as interdependent like the organs of the body. These analogies fall deceptively short, for institutions are not parts connected, or strands interwoven: they are each the whole, turned to catch the mind's light this way or that.

(To be continued)

F. EVANS.



Extract from — "SIN AND SEX"

There is little ground for the conflict of individual interests where there is little private property. Where all interests are in common, mutual assistance and goodwill are spontaneous sentiments. Common interests take the place of individual interests. To assist others, to share with them and to protect them is as natural in uncultured societies as it is natural in individualistic communities to rob, to cheat, outwit and defraud. Hence, while the Sermon on the Mount appears sublime to civilised people, it appears commonplace to savages. So commonplace and spontaneous is the social morality of the savage that it does not occur to him to formulate it as moral principles.

When people speak of safeguarding public morals, they are not alluding to the desirability of checking fraud . . . of putting down war, or poverty, or social injustice. In speaking of MORALITY, they are referring to none of

these things. What they have in mind is the exposure of unclothed human bodies, the denotation of physiological functions and organs by other than Latin words. The world is writhing under needless suffering, it is desperately crying for justice. But the righting of injustice, the safeguarding of life, are matters for lukewarm and leisurely speculation which is, indeed, generally regarded as of questionable taste and doubtful repute. Meanwhile, 'public morals' are being safeguarded, the observance of the tabus of decency is being enforced with fierce, ferocious and effective zeal

* * *

It must not be imagined that savages are, as the unfortunate term suggests, brutal, bestial, and inhuman. Quite on the contrary, they are very agreeable and pleasant people. It is impossible for anyone to become acquainted

with them and to live amongst them for some time, without being drawn to them by feelings of affection. They are very nice people. And their niceness arises from their truly affectionate disposition. Indeed there is more love, in the general sense of the word, in uncultured than in cultural societies. There is a thousand times more love in a tribe of howling Melanesian cannibals than in any gathering of the fashionable in Mayfair, or of the intellectuals in Chelsea. It is to that natural affectionate disposition, as I have repeatedly insisted, that human society owes the possibility of its rise out of animality—much more than to brain and cleverness. But the charming contrast between Melanesia and Mayfair, all to the advantage of the former, is due precisely to the fact that the affectionate disposition of the Melanesian savage is frittered away on all and sundry, whereas the men and women of May-

fair cordially detest one another and know perfectly well that they are themselves detested by most of their 'friends'.

The latter state of things is very deplorable, but it is the inevitable result of a society founded upon individualism and the rights of private property—disguised at times as 'the family'. In such a society, everyone, man or woman, must look after himself or herself first. Nobody else will. All the people with whom I have to deal are very nice people. They are really quite as affectionate in disposition as the Melanesian cannibals. I do firmly believe that when they rob me, malign me, and kick me when I am down, they are grieved in their

hearts at doing so. But que voulez vous. They must look after themselves first. They must also look after their families, their wives and children—the foundation of society. Consequently they cannot afford to waste much time in sympathy over the consequences of their having robbed, cheated, slandered, and kicked me.

. . . And yet, despite everything, they are essentially affectionate people. They are just as affectionate as the Melanesian cannibal. Human nature has not changed in that respect. If anything, it has improved. The modern men and women are probably more tenderly and deeply affectionate than the cannibals.

They show it in the infallible appeal of sentiment, of sentimentality, however sugary and soppy, which they can indulge in without jeopardising their own safety. They feel their position. It is simply intolerable . . . Each of them, man or woman, longs, if the truth be told, for sympathy and affection. Each longs beyond anything in the world to be able to put aside, if only for a short interval or respite, his or her self-defensive armour, the terrible necessity of looking after themselves, of being on their guard, of distrusting every other human being. They long for love."

ROBERT BRIFFAULT.

NOTES ON FUEL AND POWER SOURCES

The physicists have shown that heat can be converted into work, or heating power to mechanical power, so here both these manifestations of power are treated together.

The main sources of power in use today are coal and oil. They are removed from the bowels of the earth, refined somewhat and then transported to the engines that they are to drive. They suit the needs of a trading world very adequately for they can be used in any size of engine, from the small internal combustion types in motor cars to the turbines used in large powered plants, and even more important, these machines can run for 24 hours each day if necessary.

To these the possibility of atomic or nuclear power has now been added. A superficial analysis indicates that this is an entirely new type of power source, and so some people have rashly called the use of atomic power another industrial revolution. But this is a fallacious view. The source of the energy is the transmutation of the atoms of the substance. In burning coal or oil the atomic structure is unaltered, while the atoms are rearranged and the molecular structure is changed. But it is not the physical nature of the energy that causes industrial revolutions—it is the human uses of the energy or power that is important. The atoms of uranium to be transmuted must be mined, refined somewhat, and then transported to the power house (in this case an atomic pile). The atomic energy released can be transformed into electricity or heat, or even "canned" into an atom bomb, as oil can be "canned" into an oil bomb.

Thus we see that the human uses of atomic power, are as yet, no different from those of molecular power. In fact the basic power source of capitalism must be mineral, for only in that way will the "Iron Master" obtain an obedient slave. Even vegetables have their seasons!

POTENTIALITIES OF FUELS—

Oil is mined by machinery at the moment,

and any changes in these methods in the future will be refinements, not fundamental changes in the method of production.

Coal is at present mined in three main ways. In the crude direct method a human being works at the coal face with a tool (in this case a pick) and animals (in England pit ponies) carry or pull the coal to the surface, or, in the case of a surface working, to the washery. Usually, in a mechanised mine the collier uses a machine to cut the coal, and haulers, trains and pit cages carry it to the washery. An interesting hydro-mechanical method was tried out in 1937 at Sverdlovsk (U.S.S.R.). In this method the coal is smashed up and carried away by high-pressure jets of water directed at the coal-face. The water not only wins the coal, but also transports it in troughs and the smaller particles are even pumped to the surface in the water. It was estimated that the method increased the productivity of labour three-fold and cut the production costs by a half. By 1940 it was being applied in several other mines. The underground gasification method is a completely automatic method of mining coal. Lilley describes it as follows:

"It eliminates mining altogether and turns the coal seam into an underground gasworks. Air or steam or a combination or alternation of the two is pumped down one shaft to the burning coal seam and up another comes the gas, which can be varied in composition at will. . . . The method shows several advantages over mining, at least for some types of seams. It abolishes the dangers of underground work. It extracts 80-90 per cent of the coal, as against 60 per cent by mining methods. It makes economical the exploitation of seams which are too thin and of too low quality for ordinary methods. Although the method is still in its infancy, it is claimed that it has already reduced the cost of power production from coal to one-third of the usual. The gas which emerges is used for electric power generation

and as the basis for synthetic chemical industries, besides being distributed to consumers in the same way as ordinary town gas."

—P. 154, "Men, Machines and History." Cobbett Press (1948)

In 1949 the Ministry of Fuel and Power began large-scale trials on the underground gasification method at Newman Spinney near Chesterfield, and followed this up by starting further trials at Bayton in Worcestershire last year. Here shallow coal seams are utilised and the gas is used to drive electric power-producing turbines at the pithead. It has also been suggested that coal could be turned directly into electric power underground, by constructing a Coal-Cell in the seam. The coal would then produce an electric current, just as a simple dry battery used in pocket torches does, and this current would be brought to the surface by a cable. In principle, at any rate, this is simplicity itself.

Atomic power, in contrast to the other two, is as yet primarily a war weapon. Besides the uranium and plutonium bombs of the last war, we are told that Hell bombs, atomic artillery, submarines and rockets are being developed. Incidentally, some heat is being produced in the atomic piles in use today, and this could be used for central heating, or converted into electric power. However, as far as simple, useful power is concerned Sir John Cockcroft, the director of the atomic research establishment at Harwell, has stated that:

"We can be fairly certain that there will be no large-scale development in the next decade, and it is unlikely that any appreciable part of world power will come from nuclear sources in the following decade, though there may well be special applications of importance."

—P. 95, "Atomic Energy" (Penguin Books), 1950

ROBERTUS.